



USA in ABU GHRAIB and OTHER ANGRY POEMS

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*"Indeed, I tremble for my country when reflect that God is just:
that his justice cannot sleep forever."*

Thomas Jefferson, US president (1801-1809)

In May 1996 Lesley Stahl on *60 Minutes* asked Madeleine Albright (the late Secretary of State): "We have heard that half a million (Iraqi) children have died. I mean, that's more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?" and Albright replied, "We think the price is worth it."

Lady Liberty and Torture

Something will happen, he told himself
Daybreak, fatigue or my prayers
Will weaken the torturer's resolve.
If it's a breezy night
The wind may carry
Babies' cries from the village near Abu Ghraib,
And stir the mother's instincts in her large bosom.
After midnight
He put all his hope in boredom
There is only so much pleasure
She can get from another person's pain.
But the woman persisted
With a heated vengeance of an Iraqi tribesman
Defending his honor.
And the male guards tried even harder
To prove that they are better at it.
And one by one they posed
Pointing fingers at his nakedness.

He wished he could swallow the blood
To clear his throat
And regain control of his dead tongue
Even for just a brief moment
So, he could beseech their stony goddess
With her fake torch
And tearless eyes for a quick death.

Communion at Abu Ghraib Prison

Slaps

Echoes

Shouts

Laughs

White

Bright light

Curses

Spits

On his face

Blood oozed

Hot

Red

On gray beard

Dripping on his bare flesh

Pinned to the cross

Black dog stood

Poised

To fetch its masters

A pound of private flesh.

Whispers

Snickers

Policeman's truncheons

Cattle's prods

Blindfolded eyes

Fingers

Objects

Poking

Pigs! His blood shouts

Silence

A lull? He hoped.

Jaws forced open

Taste of flesh on his tongue

Salty

Warm liquid

Poured down his throat

Laughs

Now you are in communion with us

In flesh and blood

He chokes

Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!

He moans:

Sadam is back.

Ultimate Freedom in Abu Ghraib

Be as weak as water, my mother's ghost said
Which must endure so much pain
To rise to its predestined, sublime state.
Even torturers must rest and eat
But often force of Abu Ghraib's habits dictates
Sprinkling few grains of salt
On your open wounds, she sobbed.
Son! Even the blindfolded ox
That moved the miller's stone
Can trace the orbit of its fate
And foresee the ultimate freedom
Beyond its last gasp.

Twentieth Century Genocide

Not the stuff for a Viking tale
Carried across frigid waters
To season the thick froth of boredom
Served on winter's frugal tables.
Never a Mongol returned to his woman
Her eyes searching and ready
To mock hands empty of bloodstains
For the savage fresco of their tent.
And where are the crowns and treasures
That a Hun can count on his fingers
Sucked clean of the day's fat and gore?
The Americans were more like Romans, arrogant and lustful
When they fed us to the lions of their rage.

The Ira'keys

Despite the raging dust storm
That suffocated us
And the smell of cordite
That burned our eyes
And a sense of foreboding
About the coming of the total strangers
There was a compelling relief
And hope
Repelling the dark thoughts
And the lingering doubts
What would our women think of us
After the Americans, not us, brought down the Dictator's statues
Can we ever look them in the eyes again
And remind them of their places?
Will the children again kiss our hands
Every morning like children before them did?
We tried hard to convince ourselves
That this time it will be different
They could not ignore

What every anthropologist knows about our precious dignity
And what even camera-toting tourists
Can tell you about the importance of keeping face
Unless of course
They have come to the wrong place
And they mistake us for another people
If not
Why are they then calling us Ira'keys?

Transforming Raysan*

Raysan has the typical features
Of an Iraqi peasant
He has somehow kept his dignified pose
And his head held high
Despite the daily humiliation
Of an absolute ruler
And the big aching hole in his heart
Left by the premature death of two of his sons
In his country's futile wars.
He still went out every day
To his field
And occasionally spent an idle hour
Chatting with friends in the coffee house.
He was certainly glad
To see the blond soldiers
And their not-so-blond allies
Drive out the dictator's henchmen.
He never called them an occupation force
Or spat at their backs

And he did once wave at a military convoy
But saw only himself waving back
In their reflective sunglasses.
He would have opened the door for them
If they had not broken it down
And would have let them search his hut
If they had only asked
But they came
Killed his last son
And crippled him
And though all the strong shoulders
Of his sons were gone
And Raysan can count only on his crutches
He is a very dangerous man.

*Based on true story. Published in **Blue Collar**, Journal of
Progressive Working-Class Literature (US), Winter 2004-2005,
p. 51.

An Iraqi Soldier's Peace*

Hamdan, my cousin, is his same old self
He still has his father's enigmatic smile,
Bubbly laugh
And his slight hand tremors
That you will notice only if you know him long enough
To share a meal with him.
But for the watchful eyes
That knew him since childhood
He was not the same man
Sadam drafted in his wars.
He believes divine justice kept him alive.
He is certainly a good man
That anyone would want to befriend.
Hamdan's war stories are more potent
Than prophets armed
With hell's fire and brimstone.
His eyes travel far
While he recalls the few
That survived the Iraqi wars

And remembers fully the names and faces
Of men who literally lost their heads
Cut off, clean or unclean who cares, by shrapnel.
And the fear and there was more of that than death
That stored frozen hell into soldiers' minds.
Even innocent Hamdan
Who swears he never harmed a living thing
Must also suffer the torment
Of the witnesses' nightmares
He relives every night.
"War," he cries, "never ends for the soldiers who survive."
Every night, Hamdan with all the others
Even the decapitated ones,
Put on their helmets
And report to duty.

*Based on true story. Published in **Blue Collar**, Journal of
Progressive Working Class Literature (US), Winter 2004-2005,
p. 52.

Severed Head to US GIs

Bloodless and cold
From the uprooting steel
My lips stopped in mid-whisper
And just before my eyes froze
On a gritty view of earth
My mind had one last angry thought.
I shall send my ghost back
To haunt all of you Yankee GIs
So, sell your medals on eBay
To buy booze and meth
And get your fathers' colts ready
To play Russian roulette with me.

Dead Marshes of Iraq*

The pottery workshop is closed
The cracks in the mud yawned
And artists are no longer welcome
To copy the fine features of Adam.
Silence has no recollection
Of crickets and bullfrogs holding concert
And the birds' footprints were all erased
During water's final retreat.
Only stubborn reeds remained
Tall as soldiers but harmless like grass
That no longer offer their self-crafted flutes
To the wind on its musical tours.
Few abandoned canoes
Deprived of their Nazarene feet
Sink under the weight of the air.

*An earlier version of this poem was published in **ARC**, a Canadian poetry magazine, Summer 2001, p. 51.

The Looters

As the sandstorm settled down
Muddying the Tigris,
Deepening the grayness
Of the vanquished city
And burying the livings
Under a shroud of dust
Looters came out
To inflict the final humiliation.
The presidential palaces took the brunt of their rage
But there was still enough left
For everything else.

Driving on a Highway at Nighttime in Iraq

Darkness fell
Like a heavy curtain
X-raying the palm trees
And sending us back
Into a timeless zone.
It could be anytime
From now
To the Neanderthal's age.
If this is Akkad
Then this must be a caravan
Taking south to Ur
Traders with salt and pickled meat.
We whipped our camels
Sending our thoughts to the Gulf water ahead
To cool down our fear.
The camel driver began to sing
Drowning the mysterious terrifying sounds,
Genies, said the camel driver.

He should know

The acoustics of sound

And the maps of places and Genies' feet

Here on land and in the sky.

The sudden breeze pricked the camels' ears

Stirred the hooded palms' heads

As if tortured.

This time the roaring sounds rose

Not from the invaders

But from inside our hearts

And then we all knew

In utter silence and darkness

That it was time

To face our fears.

Hemingway in Iraq

It was just a wild thought
And why not, let us send someone more familiar
Than Gilgamesh or Enkidu of legends
To report for us on war in Iraq.
And if he accepts, I will be his guide
He can even stay at my home by the Tigris River.
But just in case he comes across ungrateful natives
Would Papa mind wearing a traditional headdress
To disguise his fair complexion.
Warn him there is no nightlife in Baghdad
After all the belly dancers left to entertain festive oil sheikhs.
And the doors of the museum are closed
After the few exhibits left by the foreign archaeologists
And the replicas looted.
And now my people have to prove that they do have a past
And their ancestors once ruled the 'civilized' world
Just like Americans do now,
And there were scientists and poets and even mad rulers
Who thought God spoke to them

Like Mr. Bush Jr does.

Will Papa take part in the war

But on whose side?

And what about love?

Can he live without that?

I guess there is always time for love, even in a war zone

And marriages still go on in Baghdad amid the explosions

And people still laugh in desecrated Najaf

But only to cover up their misery

Like a terrified child whistling in a cemetery.

Death of a Field Mouse*

Over the aftermath of a Canadian storm
A full moon hovers, undisturbed
And shinning like cold milk in a tin cup.
Without Noah's trust in birds' instincts,
My soul deluged by winter woes
Is a caged animal, restless,
And addicted to frosted windows.
Was it also cabin fever that drove
A field mouse into the frozen pool
Wider and deeper than a jungle trap
Or was it the neighbor' ravenous cat
Lingering safely far from the edge
To lick the cold emptiness of its paws
Before its retreat to the fence?
Thoroughly overcome by exhaustion
But unblemished by fear
The rodent lays still on its back
As graceful as a fallen pear.
Fuming with hate and envy like a caged animal

I stood behind the triple-glazed window
Thinking of my country raped by the white hordes
And begging my vocal cords for a growl.

*An earlier version was published in Anthology, a magazine of poetry prose and art.

My Rebirth

Betrayed by disloyal glands

Four wives and 13 children

My father, cheeks hollow, false teeth missing

Already working for another mouth

Is finally dead.

As his shadow receded my world expanded.

I boldly reached under his bed

To fetch my brave new feet.

Human Passions

Knowing human kind and its passions
One cannot help sometimes
Doubting even noble sentiments
Of conspiring against the unsuspecting mind.
Claws subtly disguised in velvet
Can fake a handshake, as firm and untrue
As a nurse's "You didn't feel that!"
Landing ashore, head first, eyes-shut
And the midwife's tap stinging as much as a slap
The newborn cries over a lost passionless life.

The Byzantine After-death

After subduing the Orientals

The Byzantine monopolized the commerce in incense

Stored all angels on the tip of a chip

Banished all court jesters from all mirrors

And reduced love to its critical mass of reciprocity.

Laughter is a smooth pebble

Skipping over the tepid liquids of his heart

One, two, three and it is gone.

His generals and missionaries were happy to report

That by 1919 there were fewer cannibals and head hunters

And by 1945 they were almost extinct.

But he still obeys the old iron law of might and right

That also move rivers and ruffle grass

Which, in spite of dams and sickles,

Always return to their crooked old shapes.

Blood alone knows the genealogy of his soul wounds,

Self-inflicted and festering like the after-death.

The Christmas Tree Last Wish

The fireplace's warmth rubs its trunk
Closer than a bear on a Spring morning
Infused with the scents of meadows
And blowing hot dry breaths
Under its green flowing crinoline.
But the tree is melancholic
Crying over its severed roots
Now open, bleached wounds
And like the breasts of a bereaved mother
Bursting with curdled sap.
Plastic angels, silent bells
Paper stars and flickering lights
Weighed heavier on its branches
Than a full-grown eagle
Carrying a thrashing hare in its claws.
On a cold snowy day.
Awakened by thunder just before Christmas dawn
The dying tree made a last wish

For a quick death by lightning.

Ashes to Gaza

The rain tap-dances to the wind's tunes

The asphalt mists with summer's wrath

In the ruined Gaza, US bombs-riddled rubbles stir

And two bloodied hands rise

One is clinching a gun.

Grain of Sand

Pity that snotty rose unrepelled
By the lingering kiss of an ugly pest,
And the last drops in the watering hole
That cannot say enough to greedy lips,
Or that slender gazelle's neck
Seducing a lion's grisly lust,
But scorn white soldiers rushing to their death
Dispatched by pins on a general's plot.
Real strength does exist
In a detached grain of sand
Neither a mighty flood can drown
Nor a crunching jaw bends.
Whether it turns into a pearl on a necklace
Or glorious Venus on Botticelli's canvas
It cares less.

From the Diary of a Demented American Pilot

It should only be seen in colors,
The demented pilot kept saying
Yellow, green, blue and the inevitable red
Enough to paint countless rainbows
Broken rainbows, that is,
Splashed by a frenzied artist
Against the blue canvas of a clueless day.
Now those who saw it in black and white,
The demented pilot added scornfully,
Spoke only of a white flash
But with only a can of those vibrant rainbows
Out comes a stack of harvested wheat at sunup
Yellow with a trace of green, topped with a crimson hue
Or better a fresh bouquet of wild flowers
Poppies, violets, daffodils and bewitched sunflowers
A timely wreath for Hanoi
Kabul
Baghdad

Gaza...

The Castle's Keeper

Tuwair is a Saudi castle,
And he was its keeper
Who oversaw every day through his panoramic window
From inside his air-conditioned office
Scores of migrant workers
Slaving at the Castle's manicured gardens.
I was his guest for almost a month
And he chose me from all others
To be his companion and confidant
And I, out of sheer boredom,
Faked empathy with his existential suffering
All the time concealing my anger at him
For not giving me a room with satellite channels.
Perhaps I should have been grateful
For saving me from the current horror series
Produced by Americans in my home country Iraq.
After a young friend committed suicide
I kept a vigilant eye for those

Whose words smiled but their minds said:
Help me! in an ultrasonic whisper
But not the desperate castle keeper
He almost shouted once:
"Why do we continue to live?"
I tried to refute his point with much reason
But with the little emotion one reserves for strangers
To keep them at arm's length.
He persistently came back again
With handshakes that tapped SOS
And a stomach that rumbled with suppressed tension
And I was even callous enough to imagine
The ways in which he could end his life
Moved by my loathing for all castles dwellers
While we, Iraqi peasants
Stood at their gates,
Fought their enemies
And died.

Funeral Parlor

The undertaker's eyes are guiltless,
The sweat of his sixty-seven years
Has been fanned by two generations of apprentices
Who learned that the secret of their trade
Is in treating death as a broker
Entitled to welcome and contempt.
Though he is now retired behind a desk
He can still look death in the unflinching eyes
And occasionally ridicule the ancient tyrant:
"The Angel of death works for me,
That great farmer of souls never ceases to toil.
A long time ago we tossed a coin
And though he won all the corn
I make my silver from the cobs."

Running Scared

The sun and the earth continue spinning
A wizard's old cape into the illusion of night
Meteorites betray the tailor's fading eyesight.
Things unaffected by the soiree's hypnotic act
Are now alert and ready to escape.
The terrified houses sigh and creaks
Only a purgative flood or an earthquake
Can exorcise from their chambers their resident fears.
Under the cover of swaying with the breeze
Trees thrust their eroded files
To loosen bricks and mortar in the fence.
Soon, nothing will stand between them
And the safety of a forest
Only their entangled roots.
Undeterred by traffic lights
Streets flee in all directions.
Cul-de-sacs, however, are suicidal.
Even the darkness rushes towards dawn

Oblivious of its lethal bleach.

Because the terrible white hunter is stirring

Under the graven image of his God,

His most cherished trophy nailed to the wall.

The Magician

His blond assistant smiled even when she was cut in half.

Doves still eat out of his hands

And the rabbit in his hat stopped twitching its ears

After becoming one of his extended family

Together with all the handkerchiefs up his sleeves

That never embarrassed him by showing up unannounced.

He fears only his pampered hands;

One day, they shall be his ruin.

Reminder For Western Parents

In spite of your green houses, hydroponic wonders
And the promised cornucopia of your genetic engineering
The sun can still claim a feudal share
In your crops and ripened fruits
Along with the soil cradling your seed,
The clouds feeding your streams
And the bees and birds expecting neither wages nor gratitude.
Yours alone are the mad cows imitating an alcoholic gait
The water that silenced the crickets' songs
And the poisoned milk in your women breasts.
Better then expose your infants to the elements
To let the gentler Spartan decide their fate.

Meriam's Date Palm

When the beholder gave his eyes
To the splendor of time and place
Poetry was conceived,
And for the poet's sake
The desert paraded its harem of oases.
The date palm was a gift to Meriam
A midwife to support her backbone
And sweeten the tongue of her infant.
On that day, the air was a bridge
Of light sheets between heaven and earth.

Mock Joy

Between melancholy, chronic and incurable
And joy as fake as a Canadian spring day
Villains, past and present, summoned by my addictive memory
Wreak havoc on my weak defenses.
Eventually, I assure myself, fire will consume itself
And water will reign again as "In the beginning".
In the meantime, while vapor dance to the kettle's bagpipe
Turn your heart to the seconds of mock joy.

Astrologer

I opened my palm's map
For her to explore the lands
Of what, where and when
But she lost her way
Inside my eyes where she searched
For hidden portals and windows.
Being totally tuned to the soul
She was bound to ignore albums
In which yellowed pictures
Extend invisible hands
To framed empty spaces
Reserved for those that never came.

Hunting Ducks with My Father

Between harvesting and ploughing seasons
When the land takes a breathing spell
Its grey-black stubble unshaven
And women sing with full-bellied voices
At the brief banquet of overflowing silos
My father took me duck-hunting
In the once-alive marshes of Mesopotamia
Where I saw scrawny insects walk on water
And reverend herons fly in terror
Drawn by the neck into the misty air
That was suddenly alive with the grunts
Of two wild boars aiming their tusks at us.
Our boatman — Johar — backpaddled in a frenzy
The water sucking hungrily at his oars
And before my father lifted his shotgun and fired
I silenced the marshes with my screams
And though the boars vanished into the thicket
They have since then been dwelling

In the shameful world of my nightmares.

A Modern Fairy Tale Read to US Children

When the sky fell down that morning
None was inspired by heroism
And Saint George was on the wrong side
So, they had to appease the atomic dragon
And Hiroshima was consumed.

Caged like Us

Eyes half shut, worries skid and slip
By my smooth colored feathers
I will soon make my daily day dream tour
In a rain forest where lizards
Copy colors of infinite pixels
And ferns squat like old oriental women
With no mouths to cover
When the rain laughs.
But faithfully I shall return to my blonde keeper
Who provides me with food and water
And a wire cage to trim my beak on
So that I can sing for his amusement
And wish him dead behind his back.

COLORLESS

The sly night never really goes away
It tucks itself in the day's baggy folds
And like the sea pulled back by the harnessing tide
It leaves a trail of dark puddles behind
Deep in the narrow corridors of my mind
Refilling the inkpot of my thoughts
With the dull despair of a shade of gray.

Fire at Larwence Station

Robbed of ambition, I am full of curiosity,
Powerless, my heart has been absolutely corrupted
By the love of utopian dreams
That can soar high
Even in the stale air of the underground.
Inspired by the shriek of tortured metal
And the acrid smell of smoke
I searched for an unfinished paperback
Abandoned in panic with no bookmark
Or damp fingerprints on a pole
But the commuters with their masks intact
And neatly folded newspapers
Calmly saluted the firemen
And filed out in orderly fashion
Only the blood-red digits of the station clock
Made them gasp.

Filicide at No.193

Defiant of the withering strokes of time
The memory, like a troubled ghost,
Returns promptly at the intersection
where a school crossing guard
Permanently lost her forced cheerfulness
Along with all the neighborhood mothers
Who did not go out to compare lawns
But stayed home that morning
To mend the thinning fabric of their families
Exposed by the filicide at number 193.
Policemen and orderlies finally departed with the body bags
That gave no answers or pointed fingers
Leaving journalists to theorize about the poisonous cocktail
Of a wounded male ego and the female last resort to ridicule
Finally, the house was pronounced guiltless
By teams of cleaners and a shaman
But mothers are still anxious
And avoid looking deep into their husbands' eyes.

The Fox in Town

The morning was mid-way between the birds' songs

And the school buses load of children's yawns

When a fox darted across the road.

With the gaiety of a young bride,

It lifted its bushy tail above the puddles

Pausing only to throw back its bouquet

Of fresh dawns to the awakening fields

And full udders to the noisy barns.

In a neighbor house an old hound

Confused by a long-forgotten instinct

Stirred lazily and uttered a single hollow bark.

Fox, let me gaze into your eyes

To read untold fables of wiles

And learn how a twig walks with the hurricane

And sunflowers stare down the sun

Before I continue to rot slowly

Wrapped around the fat neck of a Canadian town.

A Man Pushes a Woman in Front of a Train

He casts his eyes as far as the tunnel
And slowly tows in the morning catch
Across the calm surface of the station's tiles.
After checking their eyes for freshness
His nodding head approves all except one
Slim as an eel and threatening to slip through his precise
geometry.
His mind is made up
And he only needs to raise a finger
For the scenery to change.
The water recedes to reveal stadium
And the sea-born creatures turn into a crowd
Above all he sits, an American emperor and a god
Dispensing destinies with the tip of a finger.

Refugee

Against the onslaught of the icy cold wind
His lungs hissed like punctured tires.
His fingers refused to come out again
To recount the frozen months before spring.
He considered walking to the park
To reeducate his mind in the monotony of watching pigeons
And hope for a familiar tongue among the few visitors
Driven like him by the frigid solitude.
Anything to delay the eventual retreat to the council's flat
For a fifteen minutes round with stiff English vowels.
Finally, driven by the salmon instinct,
He would unfold memorized maps of his country
Where arrows of wise geese always land in winter.

Notes on a Bosnian Newsreel

At the press of a button, salvos fly across the screen
Punching phosphorous holes in the pale pre-dawn village.
Somewhere unseen doves are opening their startled eyes.
The scene shifts to a street corner and the familiar view
Of armored vehicles idling impatiently.
A blur from infinity slowly mutates into a hilltop cemetery
Featuring tiny crosses and crescents
Hastily chalked on the tombstones, almost as an afterthought.
Today, the cemetery is barred to all, the broadcaster announced
Including the fresh killed in the old market place.
The newsreel zooms on a broken kitten heel
Sketching with its nearby amputated leg a child's question mark.
At three o'clock, a girl lies obscenely under an overturned cart
Where she took shelter yesterday.
If she had a face, she would be home before noon.
At the press of a button, European skies
Are dripping fake white tears on weather charts.

Words

In the beginning humans wrote in cuneiform
Letters that looked like nails and pins
Since then, they learned calligraphy
But their words never lost their sting.

Luckily, I was born in '48
Barely missing salvos of lethal words
Shot by European tyrants
Along the barrels of their civilized hands.

Words easily jump off my tongue
But to impress they must execute
A double somersault in a backward dive
And a quick return to the surface for a score of ten.

Men and women sleep soundly
Though their civilized world
Is lit by fake neon words.

Seven Steps to Heaven

As easily as date palm shoots ascend the rings of seasons
My seven maternal cousins grew into fine young men.
Uncle called them his stepladder to Heaven.
When the time comes, I shall climb on their wide firm shoulders
The poor flour-faced miller repeated to his assistant
To reach the ultimate peace in the next life.
War took away the little peace he had in this life
And one by one the sons broke their mother's heart
In their khaki uniforms waving good-by.
For eight years my uncle dreamt good omens
Dutifully confirmed by his wishful wife.
Finally, the war stopped bringing back loved ones
And late relief to the village people
But not my uncle mourning his number four son
Soon after he died one step short of Heaven.

Stalin and Son

Stalin's eyes brimmed with gifts of promises
Lavished on the delicate figure of his newborn son.
There will be merry times for swimming lessons,
Hunting trips and walking together to the barber shop.
But ahead of these colored promises loomed
A dark determination, deep inside the inscrutable mind.
The father will forsake his son to the mangled cross
To save the world in his own mysterious way.

The Telltale

Then it became necessary to balance the heavenly scale
And salvage Eden's grace from the idleness of the motherless one
Who ate out of her hand and stroked her face
For the serpent to drive them apart.
Still, I did not utter a sigh to the spying wind
Or a whisper to the angle of the fruit.
But one night my sleep was disturbed
By a dream of her progeny carrying metal teeth in their hands
And while they experimented in botany
And their serpent dabbled in the black art
Birds searched in vain for their extinct perches
And lonely eagles, no longer the aviary's pride,
Lost their soaring instinct, fell and died.
I had no choice then and no guilt
When their banishment was meted out.
And I would not protest or shed an autumn tear
If the historians or the theologians call me the telltale tree.

Animal-Kind

Birds which thanks to Pavlovian coaching
Can now read traffic lights
Sing only between rush hours.
Doves perform shows in parks
To earn their wages in sugared corns.
Flies with a taste for commerce
Fake death in insecticides ads.
Killer whales serve in water worlds
To clean their records.
Mankind prefers toothless circus lions
And stupid bulls maddened by red rags.
It took the mauling of the Amazing Bruno,
Cane, lashing whip, chair and all
And the goring of the embroidered Jose
To restore our faith in the animal-kind.

Romantic Novels

Attempting to rise on their alphabetical crutches
They never attain resurrection from their celluloid shrouds.
Voiceless they strive in vain to communicate a message
To digitalized ears.
Only romantic novels never rest long enough
On shelves to rust into fairy tales.
Their spines are exercised by graceful hands,
Skins brined by tears flooded by empathy,
Rose colored by gifts of miniature hearts
And perfumed against the stench of dead trees.
With a dreamy look behind the short-sighted lenses
The librarian carries them from their rendezvous
Not on a trolley but close to her heart.

No Man's Land

Man is vain, the old man said.
Blind as a bat in a lifeless night
Home as dark as a black hole
We lit a fire and huddled tight
A hunting scene on a granite wall
Children cry, women shout.

Man is vain, the old man said
Walked the road of no return
Stole the forests and stopped the rain
Vanity, vanity
Give us back humanity.

Then, the old man said
The earth was scorched
The birds were dead
You could even sleep in a riverbed
No man's land, no man's land

The echo sounds.

Have you ever dreamt of a rainbow flight
Touched the colors and toured the sights
Fields below golden bright
Sky above a blue delight
If only man had seen the light.

Now nothing is left
But the rodent we hunt
For nourishment
And the roaches we keep
As children' pets
Bon a petite, bon a petite, humanity
What a price for vanity humanity!

Man is vain, the old man said
Blind as a bat in a lifeless night
Stole the forests and stopped the rain
Walked the road of no return.
Vanity, vanity

Give us back humanity.

Maturity

After drawing a yolk-yellow sun
With spikes and a wide smile
The child's heart was full of hubris
And his small hands with stones.
It was a matter of time
Before the yellow turned into crimson
And the smile into a frown.

Library in Iraq

Those blank pages remaining in the notebook
More innocent-looking than an open mouse trap
As seductive as the butchered morsel on the hook
Are better left untouched.

Grim faces, sullen and serious
Lending their divided attention to the volumes
That recount histories of the brave and courteous
Are actually begging for deliverance
From the tyrant beaming honey-laced smiles
Whose pictures adorn graffiti-free walls
Innocents and fools like us
They beguile
Into committing the unforgivable hubris
Of speaking their minds.

Only the solemn librarian enthroned on his stool
Acting in brazen defiance
Makes all the noises
For he alone is above the law of silence.

Friends

Trespassing at the speed of cloudy moons
Briefly they shine, unfaithfully they fade out
And like picnic ants give nothing in return.
I have deciphered their backbiting words
On the flying pages of the wind
Rampaging in empty gardens whose winters
Are inhabited by lonely discolored benches
And pigeons losing my generous crumbs
To thieving snow of the purest white.
Under a willow's tattered umbrella, we stood
A discarded feather looked freshly plucked or shed
And uncannily resembled my friend's sharp-toothed razor
Blood was exchanged for the veins to toast and sip.
And now with a chip of ice lodged in my heart
My left hand is no longer concerned
With the right one concealed in its burrows of pockets
Searching in my wallet for a familiar face
Between the flimsy plastic and the wrinkled leather

But finding only a nickel coin

Engraved with the harsh profile of a friendless despot.

Endless Sorrow

How fast the day slips away
And night returns to furrow my face.
Visitors now shun my leprous place
Except foul-mouthed wind rapping at doors
And scattering frozen ash into the room's vacant laps.
Endless winters have chafed my lips
Which no other lips dare to touch
And break and heal the scabby sorrow.

Birds used to perch on my window-sill
Their hungry eyes and begging beaks despised
The empty silos of my blighted springs
And the scarecrow flaunting my clothes.
Endless drought has chafed my lips
Which no other lips dare to touch
And break and heal the scabby sorrow.

I have visited sleepy fields of daffodils
Stumbled and stirred the butterflies' air and morning mist

But the memory is now a yellowed postcard
Surface-mailed from a war-torn mind.
Endless sorrow has chafed my lips
Which no other lips dare to touch
And break and heal the scabby sorrow.

Did Solon, like me, have a backbone bowed by a midwife
Envied tyrants their laurels and women at their feet
But was led astray by a soothsayer's lying stars
Into the lassitude of poetry.
Endless tyrants have chafed my lips
Which no other lips dare to touch
And break and heal the scabby sorrow.

Terror

Once in a while I deny my terror of open places
Dismiss the delaying tactics of loneliness
Lingering over unseen creases in my street clothes
And rehearsing with mirrors contingencies and hasty retreats.
Coins must be pocketed for fares and tramps
Who sniffs my breaths and claim their ordained cups of coffee.
The front door key I firmly clutch and cherish
Like a straw by a bird lost in a blizzard.
But I still hesitate at the threshold
To feel and test the pointed ends of my elbows
And wonder if they are sharp enough
To return in kind the jostling of the crowds
And keep my foothold on this thin and slippery world.

Another Story of Creation

In the beginning, the flat-chested earth answered the call
Of the heavenly command and curled into a fetal sphere.
Later its moon was unceremoniously born and dispatched
To curb the excesses of the oceans' appetite.
It was then time for the old potter nail
To trace in the warm clay the mystic trail
Of the circle, history and the end of humankind tale.
How their putrid crumbs excite the maggots lust
And their slippery life will finally turn into dust
Leaving unsolved the ancient mystery
Of the circular shapes in this world's folding tapestry.

Shaitan Al-Sh'er (The Poetry Demon) *

Some believe that poets are unhinged;

Their poems talk to themselves.

When it is published it is not in vain

For editors are disguised shamans

Skilled in exorcising demons.

Let those whose work are rejected

Know they are sane.

-

* It was commonly believed in Arabia that poets were inspired by demons.

Drowned

It was the irksome chirping of dolphins
That broke the rhythm of sea waves
And awakened the tribal sirens
Urging the body to sail home.

But Noah no longer mans the rudder
Or whispers to the homing pigeons.
The crow has been lured by the beach's glitter
So, the sailor feet missed the shore.

Releasing him to the freedom of sea lanes
To drift with shepherds-less creatures
That never suffered the wisdom of canes
Or felt the close embrace of our yokes.

They all wait where suns never shine
To celebrate a pagan commune at sea
Feasting on his ripe flesh and salted wine

And for this manna thank the land.

Finally, all his breaths were gone
To extinguish the years' fast melting candles
And whistle at the horrible unknown
Snatching the final hiccups of his life.

The Tourists and the wind

Into the bosom of eagles' faith, we surrendered souls and
memories

To sail the yielding transparency of unmade landscapes.

And though dazzled by the promise of glossy places

We will soon recognize the familiar woolen-like shapes

Grazing the fine air in childhood diaries.

And like sly Greeks we huddled inside the cramped camouflage

To deceive the birds and navigate the flimsy maps

Of the wind, so noble and too polite

To peek under the skirts it lifts or suspects

The hollow echoes of its persistent raps

On the metallic skin of our subtle disguise.

No farewells were exchanged between the wind and us

When it was time for gathering its flock.

Tufts of near nothingness and pale white

It ushered to the great watering spots

To return in time for chimes of winter's clock
Replete with the old remedy for nature chronic thirst.

And then the wind being a responsible shepherd
Entrusted us to the sea breeze, gentle and full of brine
Beach master, unlike cousin wind, is gay and carefree
And the uncontested champion surfer in the land
Never pauses to rest or ogle the lassies unabashed
But only to perfume the air with his scent of iodine.

Noon at the Pyramid and a meet with the desert wind.
Sirocco playing a good hand or two with nomadic dunes
And whistling softly to distract the Sphinx
Which remains, in spite of Western grave diggers and tourists
The ever-vigilant watchdog of the Pharaohs' bones.

Voices hushed and bowing our heads to the wind
As it rushed past us to the west
To wash on the thick volumes of dewy papyri.
Forced into a neon-lit cavern for shelter
Where no sane wind dares to enter

And mingle with the suffocating air
Of cigarette smoke and dancers sweat.
An angry dead animal beating its breasts
Inside the drum, the unbearable hiss
Of the spittle inside the consumptive flute
And the undulating fat on the dancer's waist
Drove us back into the perilous street
Where the wind revived us with few slaps to our backs
And a prolonged mouth-to-mouth kiss.

In the bazar and standing on a colorful airworthy carpet
We await in a trance lift-off with a flare
But the metropolitan air can barely flutter clothesline
And only briefly alights on crowded streets
To disperse the litter and sweeps
The polluted air of the traders' lying oaths.

Sleepless on the homeward journey by boat,
Stumbling out of rocking berths into a slow-sailing night
To watch the ocean wind practice with the watercolors of the
moon

The free strokes of his avant grade art.
Never complains when dawn bleaches it white
For he will be back seeking the perfect mix of color and light.

Back in the familiar places of dreary winters
Woolen socks, hot cacao, windows shut tight
And a clear-minded albums that remembers
All fellow tourists and scenic sights
Ignoring the invisible wind howling outside
Tortured by our snobbery and the stormy night.